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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 001030

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#) [US](#)  
SUBJECT: MEK/CAMP ASHRAF: BRINGING DOWN THE TEMPERATURE

REF: A. BAGHDAD 730  
[1](#)B. 08 BAGHDAD 2658

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Patricia A. Butenis for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary: In recent weeks, the Government of Iraq (GOI) has steadily increased the pressure on the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK), prohibiting entry of additional categories of supplies and personnel. The GOI recently announced its intention to move the residents of Camp Ashraf from their current location to a new location in western or southern Iraq. We see three GOI goals in doing so: (1) to break the camp leadership's hold over the residents in the hope the latter will defect and seek residence in third countries; (2) to lessen Tehran's angst over the presence of this opposition group close to the border, eliminating the threat of Iranian armed action; and thereby (3) give the GOI time to develop a politically acceptable solution to the issue, such as a resettlement program.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary continued: Embassy continues to press the GOI not to violate its assurances of humane treatment. Embassy and MNF-I believe that assisting the GOI and MEK to reach an agreement for the voluntary, peaceful relocation within Iraq of the Camp Ashraf residents (CAR) would be preferable to the status quo. Achieving this goal will, we judge, require the GOI to offer a quid pro quo, such as some recognition of temporary residence status or at least a political acceptance of these individuals' temporary presence in Iraq. Mission proposes to inform the Prime Minister that the USG is prepared to work with the GOI and MEK to explore voluntary relocation as a temporary measure. We will continue to caution the MEK that its high-profile information operations are making our efforts to protect them more difficult. Meanwhile, we will continue to consult with local diplomatic representatives to determine options for repatriating or resettling CAR. End Summary.

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GOI Puts the Squeeze on the MEK  
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[1](#)3. (SBU) On March 28 Iraqi National Security Advisor Mowaffak al-Rubaie told Western journalists that the GOI intends to move the MEK from Camp Ashraf, which is relatively close to the Iranian border, to a new location in western or southern Iraq. The GOI hopes to separate MEK leadership from the rest of the CAR (whom he referred to as "brainwashed cult members") so the rank-and-file residents can be "detoxified." Rubaie said that the MEK "should understand that their days in Iraq are numbered...we are literally counting them." Rubaie also said, "The party is over for Coalition protection for them," and added that the GOI would have a "thick skin" when it comes to possible negative press about eventual repatriation of the CAR to their home countries.

¶4. (S/NF) Rubaie's comments are consistent with GOI communications to Embassy as well as GOI actions towards the CAR. In the last two weeks, the GOI has increased pressure on the CAR, blocking the MEK from selling trailers they manufacture and prohibiting the entry of some categories of supplies and persons. Of significant concern: the Iraqi Army (IA) evidently harassed Iraqi physicians who traveled to Camp Ashraf to assist Camp Ashraf doctors in treating residents (including a case of appendicitis) and prevented the entry into the camp of a shipment of chemicals used in the Ashraf water purification system. (Note: Like most stories involving Ashraf, the reality is complex. Contrary to press reports, the physicians were not flat-out denied entry to the camp, but rather either did not have the 'required' five pieces of identification (a misunderstanding by the guard force of the rules) or felt sufficiently humiliated/intimidated by the process to leave and not return. The Iraqi Army forces offered to drive patients to an Iraqi hospital, and the GOI interagency Ashraf Committee subsequently devised a plan to place the Ministry of Health in charge of medical care at Ashraf. End Note.) Embassy considers these actions to be potential violations of GOI's assurances of humane treatment (Ref B) and will raise these concerns at the highest level. We will continue to caution the MEK that its high-profile information operations are making our efforts to protect them more difficult.

¶5. (S/NF) As noted, Iraq views the CAR rank-and-file as brainwashed, and moving the camp may allow them to segregate 25-50 key leaders from the general populace, providing an opportunity for 'deprogramming' them prior to relocating them

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to other countries. GOI leaders appear also to believe that moving the camp farther from Iran would lessen Iranian angst and lessen what the GOI sees as a very real possibility of Iranian armed action against the camp. Rubaie has stated that Iranian officials told him that it still considers the MEK a terrorist organization and said in January it might attack "within two months" if the Camp Ashraf situation was not resolved (Ref A). Iranian Quds Force operatives are suspected to have played a part in the destruction of the Camp Ashraf water pumping station in February 2008 and at least two indirect fire attacks on the camp since 2003 have been attributed by the MEK to be by Iranian or Iranian backed forces. Iran may continue to conduct harassment attacks and could pay local criminal elements to attack Ashraf with indirect fire. An Iranian UAV shot down by U.S. aircraft in March 2009 had scouted Ashraf prior to its destruction.

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Voluntary Relocation - An Idea Whose Time Has Come  
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¶6. (S) Embassy supports the GOI plan to move the CAR to a new location outside of Camp Ashraf, with the strong caveat that it be done in a manner consistent with international human rights norms and the GOI's assurances of humane treatment. Any effort to move the residents by force or to segregate residents could lead the MEK leadership to instigate a humanitarian disaster - i.e., forced suicides. Thus we see this course of action as viable only if the GOI and MEK reach agreement on the modalities. MNF-I is searching for potential locations for the residents, and will likely suggest resettling the CAR to a vacated Coalition Forces base. However, moving the CAR is not as simple as finding a new location and asking the residents to pack their belongings. At a minimum, the CAR (and international organizations) will want assurances that the condition of their new home is acceptable and it is unlikely they will voluntarily leave Camp Ashraf unless they gain some measure of status in Iraq.

¶7. (S) The MEK leadership will not agree to relocate without

extracting a concession. Highest on the MEK's agenda: temporary residency within Iraq in exchange for MEK cooperation. The GOI currently refuses to provide the CAR with anything in writing since this would, in their minds, legitimize their existence as an organization. Persuading the GOI to grant temporary residency to the CAR is likely the greatest obstacle to the plan's success. With it, the residents have a stronger claim to stay in Iraq, but without it the residents are unlikely to willfully move.

¶18. (S) Even if such a plan were agreed upon, it could derail. One failure scenario: the GOI ties itself to a deadline for the move, fails to gain the cooperation of the CAR, and then attempts to forcibly displace the residents. Another scenario: the GOI obtains consent for the move, but then segregates Ashraf leadership and, in what would likely be a violation of the humane treatment assurances, deports them to Iran, where they would probably be imprisoned, tortured or killed. Or this: that the CAR move to a new location within Iraq, and then we return to the status quo - the MEK won't leave Iraq and the GOI continues to increase the pressure resulting in inhumane treatment. Resulting in inhumane treatment.

¶19. (S/NF) So why pursue this option? We believe it offers the possibility of bringing down the temperature among the players - GOI, MEK, Iran, USG - before an incident that could damage both U.S. and Iraqi interests. The status quo has also reached a point where, we believe, GOI pressure on the MEK aimed at encouraging departure from the camp is beginning to cross the line into inhumane treatment. (Note: The Iraqi assurances to us were of a political rather than legal nature and the question of what conduct constitutes inhumane treatment, and thus is a violation of these assurances, depends on the circumstances and is open to debate. End Note.) Moving the residents could buy time while the Embassy and the GOI proceed with diplomatic initiatives to resettle the residents outside of Iraq.

¶10. (S/NF) Moving the CAR from Ashraf would also sever an important psychological barrier to their departure from Iraq. For many residents, Ashraf has been their home for decades, some since childhood. Moving them to a new location could provide them an opportunity to reassess whether Iraq is truly where they wish to reside for the rest of their lives. Moreover, Iran has conducted attacks against Camp Ashraf in the past, and could do so again, endangering CAR, GOI security forces, and Coalition Forces stationed nearby at the

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adjacent Forward Operating Base Grizzly.

¶11. (S) Embassy intends to pursue the following course of action:

-- Embassy (supported by MNF-I) will continue to advise the GOI at the highest level of the need to act in accordance with its international obligations and the assurances of humane treatment it has provided to the USG, noting the danger to its international standing that it risks through its current policy of pressure on the Ashraf residents;

-- Embassy and MNF-I will inform the GOI at the highest level that we are willing to work with the GOI and MEK to explore the voluntary relocation of the residents to a new location in Iraq, as a temporary measure, in exchange for legal temporary status while involved parties seek a long-term solution. In so doing, we would involve international organizations to ensure that the process and site meet acceptable standards.

-- A voluntary move of the MEK would be completely conducted and supported by the GOI. Coalition Forces would only be in a monitoring role during the relocation.

-- Embassy will continue to engage with local foreign

missions to explore their ability to repatriate citizens and resettle CAR with ties (e.g. family members, prior refugee status, former legal residence) to their countries. Embassy has engaged in discussions with Australia, UK, Sweden and France and intends to intensify this effort in the coming weeks.

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